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Multi-Jurisdictional Planning and Development Districts

Cooperative Extension Service
South Dakota State University
U. S. Department of Agriculture

Multi-Jurisdictional Planning and Development Districts

Galen Kelsey, Extension specialist, resource development

On December 4, 1970, South Dakota was divided into six planning and development districts by Executive Order of the Governor. The organization of multi-county planning and development districts is new to South Dakota. Nationwide however, about 600 such organizations serve about 80% of the population and encompass over half of the land area. Nearly half of the area may be classified as rural.

Q What Are Multi-County Planning and Development Districts?

A They are organizations composed of local governments—city, county and sometimes townships. Their purpose is to bring an area's government officials and community leaders together to discuss, formulate and adopt cooperative programs to meet common needs. They concentrate on problems which cross local government boundaries. They do not have the power to tax. All employ some full time professional planning staff.

Q Why Form Multi-County Planning Districts?

A The rapid growth and modernization of our nation has resulted in the emergence of a highly mobile, highly demanding public which is involved daily with a number of local governments. Domestic problems are no longer restricted to city, county or township boundaries. Many of these problems cross local boundaries and are regional in nature. These regional problems can only be solved on a broader geographic basis. Such problems include transportation, economic development, environmental control, law enforcement, health protection and many other activities. But most crucial is the increasing cost incurred in providing public services by local government. These costs have made it practical, if not essential, for local officials to pool their resources on a regional basis to meet common problems and needs.

The Federal government has moved to assist local governments in meeting the rising costs of providing public services. In the last decade, Congress passed more than 1,000 grant-in-aid programs for this purpose. Unfortunately, governments serving rural areas have not benefited by these programs to the extent intended. One reason often given is that they lacked the professional expertise to comply with the application requirements. Multi-county planning and development districts with their professional planning staffs assist member governments in meeting these planning and application requirements.

Q How Are Districts Organized?

A Districts in South Dakota are organized by a procedure in which the chairmen of the boards of county commissioners and other units of local government, such as city mayors, sign an agreement setting forth the terms under which they will work together. These terms include the representation on the District Planning and Development Committee or Council and the financing arrangements.

Membership on such boards varies throughout the nation, depending upon the chief purpose of the district. Districts which have planning or economic development as their main function will draw heavily upon the local planning commissions and the business and industrial community for membership. Committees which more directly serve units of local government depend more upon locally elected officials for membership. The programs contracted to the planning and development committees in South Dakota are of the latter type, with relatively heavy representation from locally elected officials. Membership of some boards consists only of county officials, while others include representatives of cities and towns.

Q How Are Districts Supported?

A Multi-county planning and development districts receive funds from three sources: Federal, state and local governments. Federal funds constitute the largest proportion of assistance. Presently in South Dakota, the ratio of Federal to state and local support varies from 75 to 100% with limited funds contributed by state government.

Federal funds are channeled to the districts through the many programs administered by the various Federal agencies. Such programs might include comprehensive planning, water-sewer planning, criminal justice planning, solid waste disposal, comprehensive health planning, pollution control, housing and economic development. The amount of local support required depends upon the matching requirements of the individual programs contracted to the planning and development district. Continuing Federal support depends upon the existence of the Federal grant-in-aid programs.

Q How Does A Planning and Development District Operate?

A The chief function of a planning and development district is to focus upon the needs of the

area. Day to day operations are conducted by a professional planning staff. These activities include data collection, identification of problems and a search for ways and means of meeting the area needs. The planning staff is guided by goals and policies established by the District Planning and Development Committee. The following are some examples of the types of activities undertaken. They illustrate the wide range of problems attacked and services performed.

When Rapid City was hit by the flood on June 9, 1972, the area planning district officials were on the scene to assist in providing direct immediate assistance. The waters had scarcely receded by the time a housing plan was completed to replace the homes lost in the flood; they helped obtain temporary housing until the permanent housing plan could be executed. The district also assisted city and county officials in preparing a land use plan to prevent a reoccurrence of the disaster.

The First Planning and Development District in Eastern South Dakota planned and organized a junk car and scrap metal clean up of their 10-county area, coordinating the efforts of volunteers, scrap metal crushers and transportation agencies.

Less spectacular but significant activities include the studies required for the implementation of zoning ordinances to promote the orderly growth of the Greater Metropolitan area of Sioux Falls by the South-East Council of Governments and their planning and organization efforts for rural water systems.

All of the South Dakota planning and development districts are involved in activities associated with planning law enforcement and juvenile delinquency programs. Such planning might result in regional jails and/or correction centers, area-wide law enforcement personnel training programs and the purchase and use of specialized equipment on an area-wide basis.

Similarly, as a result of both Federal and State legislation, all of the districts are involved in solid waste disposal planning. The First Planning and Development District received a grant to plan the joint use, by the 68 cities and towns as well as rural residents, of a series of sanitary landfills in the area.

Districts cooperate with other agencies and institutions in their efforts to develop plans and improve services in their area. For example, District I assisted the South Dakota State University Extension Service to obtain funds for hiring an environmental education specialist to serve their 10-county area. District II in cooperation with the University of South Dakota has opened a satellite office in Vermillion, staffed largely by interns from that University.

All of the presently organized districts exchange information with the Conservancy Sub-Districts which cross their boundaries. District U.S.D.A. Rural Development Committees meet regularly with District staff for the purpose of exchanging information and planning joint activities.

Districts contract for services too. For example, the First Planning and Development District contracted with the Institute of Social Sciences at South Dakota State University for a Human Needs Assessment Survey. The results of this survey will be used by Federal, State and local agencies to improve the system of delivering such services as welfare, employment and health care.

Another activity of multi-county planning and development bodies which is becoming increasingly important is A-95 project review. Briefly, A-95 is a directive by the Federal Office of Management and Budget which requires that certain applications for Federal funding by local governments, schools, special districts and authorities first be approved at the local level. Multi-county planning and development districts as well as Statistical Metropolitan Areas (cities of over 50,000 people) have been designated as A-95 review agencies.

Q How Do Planning and Development Districts Relate to the State and Federal Governments?

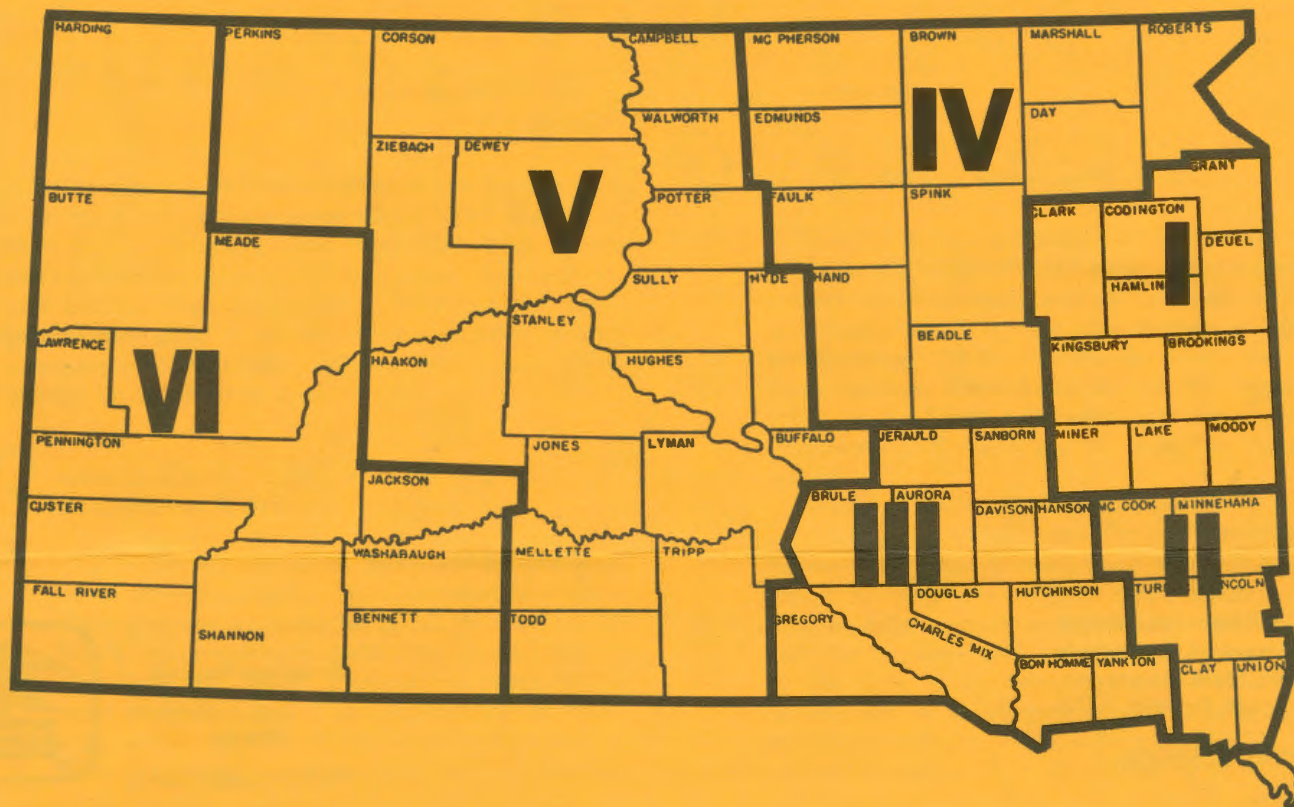
A Planning and Development Districts occupy a unique position in the hierarchy of governments. They are not a unit of government by themselves but they provide a communicating link between the local governments in the district and the State and Federal government. Agencies of both higher levels of government find it much easier to deal with one agency representing numerous local governments than to negotiate with them separately. Conversely, small local governments find they possess greater influence with such agencies when their needs are expressed by an agency representing numerous local governments and approximately 100,000 people.

Planning and Development Districts serve as a collection point for applications to Federal agencies for funds to meet like needs in each of the many communities. For example, the technical planning staff might prepare one application to meet all of the low rent public housing or water and sewer needs in the district.

Q What is the Relationship of Planning and Development Districts to the General Public?

A The general public usually is not involved in planning. They are however concerned with the results of poor planning or no planning at all. The present public concern about the quality of the environment or improper flood plain development is ample evidence of the public's stake in planning.

In the final analysis, the net result of Planning and Development Districts will depend on how well the districts become fully involved in the concerns of the people, not only to devise plans to meet their needs, but to convert these plans into meaningful actions.



Planning and Development Districts—January 1973

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